3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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Supreme Court of the Santals

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[796]

According to immemorial custom, the Santals join together in an annual hunt (*Lò bir sendra*) on the conclusion of the spring flower-festival, when opportunity is taken to discuss various questions affecting the social and religious problems of the tribe, and to decide the reference cases from the decisions of the *Desh-Pròdhans*.

Here grave social offences necessitating social excommunication and ostracism (*Bitlishà*), (as we shall see in detail very soon) constitute subjects of grave deliberation by the tribe. Such meetings are convened by the circulation of a mysterious notice by means of a knot tied to a rope as in Mayurbhanj, or a branch of *Sal* tree carried from *hat* (market) to *hat* (as in Santal Parganas). About the constitution of this privy-council, Dr. Campbell opines that a person, *Dihri* (the superintendent of the hunt), is also the president of the court which assembles in the evening, but all that our enquiries revealed in Mayurbhanj was that the Pargana, the Desh-Pròdhans of the tribe assisted by the elders called Desh-Panchayet, jointly deliberate together before declaring their verdict.

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This ancient institution, called in Santal lore *Sendra bir bichar* (a trial during a hunt at a forest) is almost extinct in Mayurbhanj, as wild games are protected by the State and no question of a tribal hunt

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decided. The penalty for non-observance of this law is that they would be socially ostracised themselves. 684 622 692

The venue of the final trial rests on the tribal chiefs and various other officials of the tribe who assemble together during their general hunting season in the month of Santal *Pata Cando* (swinging festival known as Còròk) At this big Santal assembly, the case is reopened and the parties are asked to adduce evidence in support of their case. If, however, the accused pleads guilty, there is an end of the matter, and he or she, as the case may be, is fined or ostracised. If the fine is not paid within the date fixed, ostracism takes place in lieu of fine. [623] [224] [796]

When the parties are found guilty by the assembly, the Headman, who took cognisance of the offence initially, gets his credit, but if the evidence shows that the accused persons are not guilty, he is himself seriously punished.

When a verdict of guilt is passed, a general decree of excommunication is issued and a date is fixed for the ceremony. The date and place of *Bitlahà* is communicated through the entire tribe by means of a branch of a *Sal*-tree conveyed on the shoulders of a Santal from one village to another, from one market-place to another; outside their pale few know the significance of this mysterious notice. 684 [202] [211]

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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heads of cattle they require as incidental presents to the bride's family, and the date that would suit them for the marriage ceremony. These being satisfactorily settled, the final date is fixed; the intervening number of days being shown in knots in a rope (*Bapla Gira*). Thereafter, one knot is loosened each night and when there are none, it is the day for marriage.

Rates of Bride-price (*gònòñ*)

Here, some observations as regards the rates of bride-price may prove interesting. Generally speaking, the rate of money payment for buying a bride varies between rupees three to rupees twelve in some quarters. In the Santal Parganas, rupees five is taken to be the average. But at Mayurbhanj, we were faced with two practices, the one insisted on fixed rates as rupees three or five, seven or twelve, whereas, others were disposed to be more elastic as regards any such fixity and even ready to pay more, if financially capable.[1]

As regards the ceremonial presents to the bride's party, if the bride's parents are alive, her father and brother will receive a he-calf each. If her paternal

1. In the Sadar subdivision, Mayurbhanj, bride-price goes up to R. 12. In Bamanghati and Barsai, we gathered, the sum paid does not exceed R. 3.

B Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1938-1939) 1962
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224 was a regular feature in old times but now it is organised more or less for the relaxation of state guests or when a wild animal troubles the people.

Deshua Sendra (Disom Gipitic' Sendra)[1].

[634] The date of this annual hunt is fixed by the Parganas of the hilly areas where the tribal excursion is made in the month of *Chaitra* or *Baisakh* (April—May). The information is sent round by means of 224 202 211 a knotted string called *Girà gaṭh* conveyed by the Santals.

The *modus operandi* of this information may be thus explained. Supposing a string with fifteen knots reaches the village X, the villagers will unloose a knot. When it reaches the village Y, it means that fourteen days remain for the hunt taking place. The messenger carrying the notice is changed there and another takes his place. It is his duty to inform the place of *Gipitic'*, e.g. where the tribe would rest after the hunt.

224 782 [634] [793] The preliminaries regarding which portions of the jungle would be beaten by the people of particular *monzas* (areas) being fixed by the Parganas in consultation with the tribe, the *Dihri* of the area offers pujas to the presiding deity of the hill.

[178] [579] [211] 1 This hunt has been stopped since 1916 when a mêlée took place in Mayurbhanj, so the information sent round by a string full of knots cannot now be legally circulated.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
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No information is sent by a knot of strings (*gira gatb*), it is conveyed orally. *Por Sendra* is purely a relaxation at pleasure during the mouth of *Chaitra* or *Baisakh*.

APPENDIX III

Pàris.

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(A Note on Santal clans and sub-clans by Dr. Campbell.)

"The Santals are divided into eleven septs, but originally, it is said, there were twelve, one of which has been lost. Each sept is subdivided into sub-septs of which according to the popular belief among Santals there are twelve. In fact, however, the sub-septs of each sept vary in number, as the following list will show.

Sept Kisku:—

Sub-septs:—Nij Kisku, Gaṛ . ., Ok' . ., Obòr . ., Màñjhi khil . . ., Naeke khil . . ., Son . . ., Aḍ . ., Badaṛ . . ., Biṭol . . ., Sada . . ., Paṭi . . ., Jabe . . ., Ṭika. . and Katwa...

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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believed that the Santals came to the present abode from North East India.

Dr. A. Campbell[1] is of the opinion that the Santals, or rather the people of whom they are a portion, occupied the country on both sides of the Ganges, but more especially that in the north. Starting from the north-east, they gradually worked their way up the valley of the Ganges till we find them in the neighbourhood of Benares, with their headquarters near Mirzapur. Here the main body, which had kept to the northern bank of the river, crossed, and, heading southwards, came to the Vindhya hills. This obstruction deflected them to the left, and they at length found themselves on the tableland of Chota Nagpur, and he further writes "Efforts have been made to identify the countries, rivers, forts, etc. mentioned in the traditions of the Santals with those of similar names in Chota Nagpur. Localities have in many instances been found bearing traditional names, and the inference has been drawn that it was here that the traditions of the Santals took their rise, and that their institutions were formed. But only a slight knowledge of these traditions is necessary to show that they belong to a much more remote period than the location of the Santals in Chota Nagpur, and to countries separated from it by many hundreds of miles."

Objecting to the above theory Sir Herbert Risley[2] writes the following "A people whose only means of recording facts consists of tying knots in strings, and who have no bards to hand down a national epic by

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1. The Traditional Migration of the Santal Tribe, Indian Antiquity pp. 103-4.
2. Tribes and Castes of Bengal Vol. II pp. 228-6.

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4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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oral tradition, can hardly be expected to preserve the memory of their past long enough or accurately enough for their accounts of it to possess any historical value. If, however, the legends of the Santals are regarded as an account of recent migrations, their general purport will be found to be fairly in accord with actual facts". He further writes "The earliest settlements which Santal tradition speaks of, those in Ahiri Pipri and Chai Champa, lie on the north-western frontier of the tableland of Hazaribagh and in the direct line of advance of the numerous Hindu immigrants from Bihar. That the influx of Hindus has in fact driven the Santals eastward is beyond doubt, and the line which they are known to have followed in their retreat corresponds on the whole with that attributed to them in their tribal legends".

Rev. P.O. Bodding of the Scandinavian Mission in the Santal Parganas and well known for his works on the life and customs of the Santals believes that the Santals entered India from the North Eastern gate. He draws his conclusion from their customs, language and physical features. He points out that many of the customs as preserved, point to the east, even further than Assam. He also mentions from their language that the linguistic relatives of the Santals are to be found to the east, in Southern Burma and on the Malaya Peninsula. He tries to trace their origin from their somatological characters, and says that "the Dravidian type, although the prevalent one, is by no means the only one found. Several Aryan types are met with and a Mongoloid one is not very uncommon. Other types may be found, but are too few to be taken into account. All this proves mixture of blood at some

584 and cymbals, and embrace each other. Then the bride's party comes back to their village.

After a few days the same ceremony is repeated in the bride's house. The bridegroom's party comes to the bride's house and the furture father-in-law takes the girl and seats her on his thigh and gives her a solid brass necklet and kisses her.

583 [178] **Takachal (Payment of Bride-Price):** Generally the bride's father demands twelve rupees now a days. This bride-price is divided between the following persons :—

Father of the bride gets Rs. 3/-
Mother of the bride gets Rs. 5/-
Mother's mother gets Rs. 2/-
Father's mother gets Rs. 2/-

The brother of the bride will get from the bride-groom a bull, if the bridegroom's father fails to give the bull then he pays Rs. 2 in exchange. The headman of the bride's village gets from the father of the groom one rupee. From that rupee the headman pays annas eight to the bariatko (those who follow the [178] bridegroom to the bride's house). Previously there was a custom to give rice and Pachawee and not cash.

584 585 The next function is to fix the day for marriage. The Santals give their sons and daughters in marriage generally in the month of Baisakh and Phalgun. It is their custom not to marry their children in the month 584 of birth. Through the Raibar the bridegroom's father 585 sends a string with a number of knots on it. The • 211 number of knots indicates the number of days. The father of the bride therefore getting the string understands that the bridegroom's father wants to fix his son's marriage as many days afterwards as the string

1 [Erratum: this should read "future." Cf. errata
^ sheet, category 116, p. ix -- Analyst]

contains knots. Now, if the father of the bride agrees, he sends the same number of knots on another string to the bridegroom's father by the Raibar, but if he wants to have his daughter's marriage earlier or later he sends more or less knots on the string as the case may be.

Mandwa Ceremony: Then comes the Mandwa ceremony which may takes[2] place on the marriage day or one or two days earlier. This ceremony is performed in the same manner in both bride's and bridegroom's houses. For this they build a temporary shed in the centre of the courtyard. This is a rectangular shed with a strong central post which is called *Mandwa-Khunti*. This shed is erected by the young men of the village who are known as *Mandwa Kora*. *Pachawes* and boiled rice are given to those young men both at the time of building and at the time of removing it after marriage. In the centre of the shed a branch of the Mahua tree (Madhuca latifolia Roxb) is planted and young maiden[3] of the village keep five roots of turmeric, five paddy-grains and five pice in a hole which is dug by the unmarried youngmen[1]. The Jogmanjhi brings five Kumaris (unmarried girls) to rub oil on the following persons within the Mandwa shed in the following order: Naike and his wife, Kudam naike and his wife, the headman and his wife, the Paramanik and his wife the Jogmanjhi and his wife, the parents of the bride and bridegroom, as the case may be. Last of all, in the hands of villagers who may be present there only mustard oil and turmeric is given.

[1]This has some magical significance. The rice and turmeric roots show any sign of sprouting then, the married life will be happy and never has any difficulty in married life.

[2 Erratum: i.e., "take." 3 Erratum: i.e., "maidens." -- Analyst]

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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597 of the boy renounce him and declare him henceforth to belong to the new father; it is also declared that the boy shall have no right of inheritance in the property of his natural father. When all this has been done the adopting father fixes a date for the formal adoption of the boy. The villagers of that village on that day behave as at Janam Chhatiar (name-giving ceremony of the Santal child). They shave and drink handi (rice beer). The usual procedure in a Janam Chhatiar is that the officiating midwife tells the assembled people the name of the new-born child; here she does not tell the name of the boy but the sept or sub-sept of the adopting father; henceforth that becomes the sept of the boy. Thereupon they leave the boy to eat the flesh of animals sacrificed to the tribal deities. Henceforward the boy becomes their own.

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627 **Bitlaha**: It means to outcast a Santal from society. This outcasting takes place by the order of the assembled members of the Panchayat. It is resorted to when a Santal woman indulges in sexual intercourse with either a diku (non-Santal) or with a person of the same sept. If any one commits such an offence the headman of the village in question calls his neighbouring colleagues together and informs them of the matter; if the people hold that the case is not proven, then those who started the rumour are severely punished. If it is proved, the assembly gives an order for outcasting and they proceed to carry it out the day after the annual hunt. The date of this Bitlaha is announced by a man in the market who carries a branch of a Sal tree (Shorea robusta) with leaves. The people in the market on seeing him understand the matter and count the leaves

4; Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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[211]
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of the branch (each leaf of the branch means a day) because as many leaves as it contains so many days afterwards this bitlaha is to take place. During this operation the Parganait of that bunglow and even the Sub-divisional officer of that district are generally commissioned to superintend so that nothing untoward happens. One such outcasting I saw personally about two years ago at Dumka within the Santal Pargana.

In the early morning of the appointed day the bachelors and other male members of the neighbouring villages with flutes, drums, bows and arrows meet at the end of the village street where the culprit lives. The bachelors compose extempore obscene songs in which he is mentioned by name. Drumming is kept up so terribly that the sound can be heard for miles around. At a sign from the leader the crowd with wild yells and lifted hands holding bows rushes towards the village, drumming and blowing their flutes loudly and singing obscene songs. The women of that village do not remain there; they go away to some other place to keep their prestige.

When the crowd reaches the house of the offender they tie a short charred bit of firewood, a worn-out broom and some used leaf-plates on a long pole of bamboo and fix it at the entrance to the courtyard. Within the courtyard they break the fireplace and all things and even sometimes break the house. Young men in undress desecrate the rooms.

The persons outcasted are not allowed to take food with others, they cannot give their children in marriage within the Santal community. The parents of both sides also would be outcasted, and those who give shelter to these outcasts will be treated like-wise.

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778 the last is a Mowah tree; on its foot a stone representing the deity *Gosain Era* is kept. This is the most important one and is known as Lady of the Grove.

796 247 In the Santal villages there is a succession of festivals throughout the year, nearly all connected with agricultural operations. The chief of these is the *Sohrae* or *Banda parab* or the harvest festival, celebrated in the Bengali month Pous (i.e., at the beginning of the month of January) after the rice crop of the year has been harvested. This festival generally lasts for five days. Previously there was no fixed date, villagers of one locality performing this festival one day, others performing on some other day. But now-a-days the [178] Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas fixes the • [211] date for this festival, and this date is proclaimed by a man with a *sal* branch in his hand in every *hut*. Before this *parab*, Santal women buy large earthen vessels and replace old ones which they bought in the previous year. When the day has been fixed all houses prepare "handia" (rice beer) and people invite their relatives. [793] The night before the festival commences, the *Naike* [784] is religiously-abstinent for before any sacrifice the [834] sacrificer must not have relations with a woman and should sleep on the ground on a mat. At day break [624] the *goddet* goes round and collects sacrificial fowls from every house. In the middle of the forenoon the *Naike* goes near a tank together with some of the [793] village people, the *goddet* taking the fowls with him. [782] The *Naike* bathes and then sacrifices the fowls to the different *bongas* after which the villagers cook the fowls with rice and eat them, and also drink rice beer. After this the villagers go to *Kulimucha* (i.e.,

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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animals is eaten by the men. The only woman who gets a share is the wife of the priest. Drinking, dancing and singing are followed by young men and women of the village.

Jom Sim: The *Jom Sim* is performed with many quaint ceremonies which differ somewhat for the different clans. That is why it is called clan festival. Mr. Culshaw recorded some stories from which it can be ascertained how it is connected with clan. "The Karwak Hasdak tell the story of how long ago their ancestors were celebrating the *Jom Sim* festival and all the Hasdak were present. They had performed the sacrifices and everyone had been served with rice and meat, but some of the younger folk present felt that they had not been given enough to eat, so they killed a buffalo, or kada, became known as Karwar Hasdak". The Soren Santal relate "that in the very early days the ancestors of the Soren were celebrating the *Jom Sim* festival and some of the company began to prepare the food and cook it. In imitation of Brahmin cooks they put on sacred threads and served all the people. From that time they became known as poita Soren".[1]

It is probably the oldest sacrifice the Santal have because it has more aboriginal features in it than any other sacrifice of theirs.

Dihri Hunting: The *Dihri* hunting, which is the most important hunting of the Santals which takes place once a year in the month of Falgun (February and March). *Dihri*, their hunting priest carries a big branch of a *Sal* tree with leaves and goes to the market, where people

[1] W. J. Culshaw—Tribal heritage. 1949. pp. 74 and 78.

4: Biswas D, F-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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seeing him understand the purpose of his coming. As each leaf represents a day so they count them all and go out for hunting after just the number of days as indicated by the leaves of the branch. In this hunting expedition people of distant villages take part. The *Dihri* is responsible for the hunt, i.e. (all goes well and no mishap occurs). By divination he finds out as to who are threatened by any danger during the hunt, and advises them to turn back but they generally make him sacrifice fowls for them to *Sin Bonga* to avert the impending calamity. He performs some ceremony and offers sacrifices to *bongas* of the forest where the hunt is to be held, to ensure success and safety in the following way:

The *Dihri* enters the forest and being naked, pricks his whole body except the joints, with the thorn of a bush. He then draws a small circle on the ground with powdered rice and puts some adwa rice mixed with the blood which comes out from his body and makes a vermilion mark inside the circle. The *Dihri* then gives a little rice to all the forest *bongas*. Others who are following him, then enter the forest with bows and arrows.

Mag-Sim: The Santals perform this festival in the month of Magh (January-February) when the jungle grass is mown; fowls are sacrificed to all the *bongas* by the village priest and his assistant. This festival marks the end of the Santal year. All the village officials go through the form of resigning their offices and the cultivators give up their lands. After a week the headman of the village says before all the villagers that he has changed his mind and would like to continue in the

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month. The date of the third is arranged while the first hunt is in progress, and it is announced by means of a *girq*. This is a method of reckoning dates or announcing future events. It may be used in connection with a hunt, but it is also used to announce a forthcoming marriage or a burial feast. It consists of a length of string in which a number of knots are tied, each knot representing one day. A number of *girq* are distributed to the surrounding villages during the weekly market, and they are kept by the headmen, who untie one of the knots each evening until one knot remains, when they know that the hunt takes place on the morrow.

Although the ritual meaning of the hunt has been obscured in the minds of the Santals, it is implicit in much that accompanies it. A hunt is the activity of the whole adult male population of the area. Women are not permitted to take part, but certain taboos must be observed by them while the men are away from home, to avert the lurking dangers of the forest. The prohibitions are similar to those enjoined on mourners and widows. No woman may wear flowers in her hair nor use the vermilion paint in the parting of her hair which is a sign of her married status. She should also leave off wearing the iron bangle which is another symbol of her marriage, and she must not bathe. At the present day, although the first two prohibitions are observed, there is some slackness about the others. But the main responsibility for placating the possibly malevolent influences residing in the forest rests with the *dihri*, or hunt priest. This is a special office, and the name is evidently the same as the Khond *dehuri* and the Ho *dihiri*, or priest. Among the Santals the *dihri* is a priest only at the time of the hunt, and he is appointed for the *pargana*. On the morning of the day when the hunt opens he performs the sacrifice of a brown hen on the edge of the forest which will be entered, and the tribal spirits are invoked to protect the men from wild beasts. He is encouraged by the spectators, who remind him that if any of them comes to harm they will hold him responsible. At times a certain amount of mimic hunting takes place in connection with the sacrifice, during which the *dihri* plays the part of the hunted animal.

The hunt lasts through the greater part of the day. The forest is surrounded by parties from different villages and the game gradually driven towards the centre. Within living memory the stock of game in most parts of the area has declined, and some of the hunts are now poorly attended for